

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 045426

FOR HABIB

FOLLOWING REPEAT BANGKOK 4311 ACTION SECSTATE INFO
DIA WASHDC CINCPAC HONOLULU 25 FEBRUARY 76.

QUOTE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 4311

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT PGOV TH

SUBJ: GEN BUNCHAI COMMENTS ON MILITARY ALERT IN BANGKOK, FEB
24-25

SUMMARY: FOLLOWING ARE EXCERPTS TRANSLATED BY USIS OF PRESS
CONFERENCE GIVEN BY GEN.BUNCHAI BAMRUNGPHONG, COMMANDER-IN-
CHIEF OF RTA, ON FEB 25 WITH REGARD TO MILITARY ALERT OF
FEB 24-25. WE NOTE THAT BUNCHAI ALSO COMMENTS AT SOME
LENGTH ON PROSPECTIVE WITHDRAWAL OF U.S. FORCES BY MARCH 20.
TRANSLATION OF PARAGRAPH IS ACCURATE, BUT PRECISE MEANING IS
OBSCURE. BUNCHAI HAS PREVIOUSLY INDICATED PERSONAL OPPOSITION
TO WITHDRAWAL OF U.S. FORCES FROM THAILAND BUT HAS SAID HE
WILL LOYALLY FOLLOW INSTRUCTIONS OF RTG. IN PARAGRAPH IN
QUESTION BUNCHAI SPECULATES THAT SOME QTE MIRACLE END QTE
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WOULD OCCUR TO PREVENT FULL WITHDRAWAL OF U.S. FORCES, BUT

HE HAS NOT RPT NOT EXPRESSED HIMSELF CLEARLY. DAO HAS APPENDED COMMENTS ON BUNCHAI'S PRESS CONFERENCE STATEMENTS, SOME OF WHICH APPEAR TO BE CONTRARY TO FACT. END SUMMARY.

1. FOLLOWING IS TEXT OF EXCERPTS TRANSLATED BY USIS OF PRESS CONFERENCE GIVEN BY GEN. BUNCHAI BAMRUNGPHONG ON FEB 25 REGARDING MILITARY ALERT OF FEB 24-25. BEGIN UNCLASSIFIED:

REPORTER: WHAT REASON WAS THERE FOR ORDERING AN ALERT LAST NIGHT?

BUNCHAI: THE ALERT ORDERED LAST NIGHT WAS ONLY TO TEST THE ALERTNESS OF OUR OFFICIALS, BECAUSE WE HAVEN'T CALLED AN ALERT FOR A LONG TIME. THIS TEST WAS HELD IN ORDER TO BE FULLY PREPARED TO COPE WITH ANY INCIDENT THAT MIGHT OCCUR. THE ORDER FOR THE ALERT WAS ISSUED IN THE DAYTIME AS A TEST, BUT IF AN ALERT WERE ORDERED AT THREE A.M., THEN EVERYBODY WOULD KNOW FOR CERTAIN THAT A REVOLUTION HAD BEEN STAGED. NO INCIDENT OR ANYTHING HAS OCCURRED, AND THE ALERT ENDED THIS MORNING.

REPORTER: AT WHAT TIME?

BUNCHAI: AT 6 A.M.

REPORTER: WAS THE ALERT ONLY FOR THE ARMY?

BUNCHAI: YES.

REPORTER: WAS IT CALLED ONLY IN BANGKOK?

BUNCHAI: ONLY IN BANGKOK. THERE IS A REGULATION IN FORCE FOR SIMILAR TESTS TT BE HELD IN OTHER MILITARY REGIONS REGULARLY, IN ORDER TO BE FULLY PREPARED ALL THE TIME, BECAUSE NOBODY CAN KNOW WHEN AN INCIDENT MIGHT OCCUR ANYWHERE AND ANY TIME.

REPORTER: DOES THAT MEAN THAT ARMY UNITS IN THE PROVINCES ORDER ALERTS AS TESTS THEMSELVES?
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BUNCHAI: YES. FOR INSTANCE, IT IS UP TO THE COMMANDER OF THE 2ND ARMY TO DECIDE WHEN TO ORDER AN ALERT. SINCE, HOWEVER, MILITARY REGIONS IN THE PROVINCES ARE FAR AWAY FROM BANGKOK, PEOPLE HERE MIGHT KNOW NOTHING REGARDING SUCH TESTS HELD.

REPORTER: HAS AN ALERT BEEN ORDERED IN SURAT THANI PROVINCE?

BUNCHAI: NO. ARMY UNITS ARE STATIONED THERE AND THEY ARE PERFORMING NORMAL ACTIVITIES. FOR INSTANCE, SINCE THE PEOPLE IN THAT PROVINCE ARE DEMANDING FOR ALL SCHOOLS TO BE REOPENED, WE ARE ENDEAVORING TO PROVIDE PROTECTION TO ENABLE SCHOOLS TO BE REOPENED.

REPORTER: IT IS SAID THAT THE ALERT ORDERED HERE IN BANGKOK WAS A MEASURE TO PREVENT THE STAGING OF A REVOLUTION. WHAT REASON IS THERE FOR THAT NEWS REPORT?

BUNCHAI: I DON'T KNOW. ANYBODY CAN SAY OR THINK THAT I ORDERED THIS ALERT BECAUSE I WILL STAGE A REVOLUTION; BUT IT IS NOT AT ALL TRUE. THIS ACTION I HAVE TAKEN CAN BE CONSIDERED AN INTERNAL AFFAIR OF THE ARMY.

REPORTER: WAS THIS ALERT ONLY MILITARY MANPOWER?

BUNCHAI: YES ...IF I HAD ORDERED AN ALERT ON FRIDAY, WHEN THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY OR THE NEW FORCE PARTY WERE CAMPAIGNING AND GIVING ELECTION TALKS IN THE PRAMANE GROUNDS, I WOULD CONSIDER THAT I WAS DESTROYING DEMOCRACY. I WOULD NEVER DO THAT, UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES, AND IT IS WHY I ORDERED AN ALERT ON AN ORDINARY DAY, WHEN NO ELECTION CAMPAIGNS WERE BEING HELD IN PUBLIC. FURTHERMORE, SINCE IT IS AN INTERNAL AFFAIR OF THE ARMY, WE CAN DO ANYTHING THAT IS PROPER AND SUITABLE. ISN'T THAT TRUE? I AVOIDED CALLING AN ALERT ON WEDNESDAY, BECAUSE THAT IS THE DAY ON WHICH OFFICERS LIKE TO GO AND PLAY GOLF.

REPORTER: THERE IS CONSIDERABLE TALK AND COMMENT AT PRESENT THAT THE GENERAL ELECTION MIGHT NOT BE HELD ON

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APRIL 4, THAT A MOST SERIOUS INCIDENT MIGHT OCCUR, OR THAT A REVOLUTION MIGHT BE STAGED. IN YOUR CAPACITY AS ONE OF THE PERSONS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE SAFEGUARDING OF PEACE AND ORDER, DO YOU THINK THAT SUCH INCIDENTS MIGHT OCCUR?

BUNCHAI: I DON'T BELIEVE THAT ANY INCIDENT LIKE THAT WILL OCCUR. THIS IS MY PERSONAL VIEW. ON THE OTHER HAND, AS I HAVE SAID ALREADY, ANYTHING MIGHT OCCUR ON MARCH 20.

REPORTER: WHAT IS THERE TO CAUSE ALARM?

BUNCHAI: I BELIEVE THAT EVERY THAI CHERISHES DEMOCRACY AND WANTS A GENERAL ELECTION TO BE HELD IN ACCORDANCE WITH CONSTITUTIONAL PROCEDURE.

BUT AS I HAVE SAID BEFORE, AMERICAN TROOPS MIGHT NOT BE WITHDRAWN BY MARCH 20, BECAUSE THERE MIGHT BE A MIRACLE. THIS MIRACLE IS FOR US TO CALL ON THE GOVERNMENT TO TAKE ACTION IF THEY ARE NOT WITHDRAWN, BUT IF WE CHERISH AND RESPECT DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES, WE MUST CONFIRM TO THEM IN AN ORDERLY AND PROPER MANNER. SHOULD THE GOVERNMENT NOT TAKE ANY ACTION, THEN WE MUST PUT PRESSURE ON IT. BUT UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES MUST THE AMERICAN FLAG BE PULLED DOWN, AND BE URINATED ON, AS IN THE PAST. PLEASE EXCUSE ME FOR USING THAT WORD. HOW WOULD WE THAIS FEEL SHOULD SUCH ACTION BE TAKEN AGAINST OUR NATITNOL FLAG IN A FOREIGN COUNTRY? SHOULD SUCH AN INCIDENT OCCUR AGAIN HERE, THERE MIGHT BE A REACTION OR SOMETHING UNEXPECTED MIGHT OCCUR. THESE SPECULATIONS ARE CAUSING ME WORRY.

AT PRESENT, VIOLENT CLASHES ARE OCCURING BETWEEN VARIOUS GROUPS IN OUR COUNTRY; THEREFORE, AN UNEXPECTED MIRACLE MIGHT OCCUR, AS I HAVE SAID. BUT NO REVOLUTION WILL BE STAGED. GOOD HEAVENS, HOW COULD A REVOLUTION BE EASILY STAGED NOW? AN EXAMPLE THAT CAN BE CITED IS THE SITUATION IN SURAT THANI PROVINCE, WHICH IS DETERIORATING STEADILY BUT NO DRASTIC ACTION CAN BE TAKEN TO REMEDY IT.

REPORTER: IS THERE ANY TRUTH IN CONFLICTING REPORTS THAT YOU HAVE ORDERED SPECIAL INTELLIGENCE UNITS TO STEP
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UP THEIR WORK?

BUNCHAI: YES. BUT WE ARE ONLY PERFORMING OUR DUTIES. IN OTHER WORDS, WE ARE SEARCHING FOR INTELLIGENCE REPORTS IN GENERAL, REPORTS CONCERNING THE SECURITY OF THE ARMY. BUT INTELLIGENCE REVRTS AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL ARE THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AND OF THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL. END TEXT

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2. COMMENT: DAO HAS FIRM EVIDENCE THAT THE ALERT WAS NOT RPT NOT CONFINED TO THE BANGKOK-BASED 1ST ARMY. IN ADDION, INCONTROVERTABLE FACTS REVEAL THAT THE ALERT WAS NOT RPT NOT ENDED UNTIL 1500, 25 FEB, NOT RPT NOT 0600 AS BUNCHAI STATED.

3. AS TO GEN BUNCHAI'S COMMENTS REGARDING THE TROUBLES THAT COULD OCCUR ON 20 MARCH, IT IS A WELL KNOW FACT THAT HE OPPOSES THE WITHDRAWAL OF U.S. FORCES FROM THAILAND, WAS VISIBLY UPSET WITH THE DESECRATION OF THE U.S. FLAG IN MAY, 1975, AND HAS BEEN APOLOGETIC EVER SINCE. HE

FEELS THE RECENT PUBLICITY REGARDING A RESIDUAL U.S.
PRESENCE SUBSEQUENT TO 20 MARCH WILL RESULT IN DISORDERS
ON THAT DATE. HIS "MIRACLE" IS BELIEVED TO BE A THAI
GOVERNMENTAL DECISION TO RETAIN A CERTAIN U.S. RESIDUAL
PRESENCE IN THE FACE OF A VOCAL OPPOSITION AND THAT, BARRING
SUCH A "MIRACLE", THE MILITARY SHOULD PRESSURE THE GOVERN-
MENT TOWARDS SUCH A DECISION BUT KEEP TO DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES
AT THE SAME TIME. FORESEEING SUCH A CONTINUED U.S.
MILITARY PRESENCE, HE FLATLY REJECTS ANY RECURRENCE OF THE
DISORDERLY DEMONSTRATIONS AND DESECRATION OF MAY 1975.
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